

Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho

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Executive Summary

Overview

The greater sage-grouse has historically been, and continues to be, an important species across the western rangelands. Centuries before European settlement of western North America, this bird was of ceremonial and subsistence significance to native peoples in the region. Sage-grouse are an important part of the sagebrush community and are also sometimes used as a measure of sagebrush ecosystem health.

Historical populations of sage-grouse in Idaho are not well documented. Prior to 1900 sage-grouse were not protected in Idaho. The first Idaho sage-grouse hunting season was established in 1900. As early as the 1920s, wildlife managers voiced concern about the future of Idaho's sage-grouse populations. In a trend mirroring that seen in other western states, Idaho has experienced substantial alteration and losses of sagebrush steppe habitat since European settlement.

The state of Idaho continues play a leadership role in sage-grouse conservation planning, monitoring and evaluation, and research activities. In 1997, the Idaho Sage-grouse Task Force, under direction of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, completed the Idaho Sage-grouse Management Plan (IDFG 1997). The 1997 Plan divided Idaho into sage-grouse management areas and called for the creation of Local Working Groups (LWG) that would develop sage-grouse management plans for each of Idaho's sage-grouse planning areas. Since 1997 Local Working Group plans have been completed or drafted in 5 Sage-grouse Planning Areas (SGPA).

Between May 1999 and December 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) received eight petitions to list as endangered or threatened, various populations of sage-grouse. In April 2004, USFWS determined that three of the petitions to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened provided substantial information that listing might be warranted, thus initiating a comprehensive range-wide status review. On January 7, 2005, a finding of Not Warranted was published in the Federal Register.

This 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (Plan) replaces the 1997 Idaho Sage-grouse Management Plan. This Plan incorporates significant new information and data and provides the overarching scientific and management framework within which the completed LWGs Plans will function.

This Plan includes:

- Background information and resources regarding sage-grouse and sagebrush ecology;
- A summary of the status of sage-grouse populations and habitat in Idaho;
- Identification and discussion of 19 threats to sage-grouse and their habitats;
- A toolbox of conservation measures to address each of those threats;
- Research, monitoring and evaluation guidelines and recommendations; and
- A number of appendices that provide additional information.

Management framework

The Sage-grouse Local Working Groups (LWGs) are the heart of Idaho's sage-grouse conservation strategy. The collaborative development and implementation of LWG plans is vital to successful conservation of sage-grouse in Idaho. This Plan is designed to provide guidance, tools, and resources to LWGs to facilitate development of their plans, while also encouraging a level of statewide consistency among the LWG plans. Establishment of LWGs in Sage-grouse Planning Areas (SGPAs) that currently lack them, and completion of LWG plans in all of Idaho's SGPAs, are significant priorities in Idaho.

Under the framework outlined in this Plan, the LWG plans will identify and prioritize local threats, and identify appropriate conservation measures at the mid- and fine-scale, while this state Plan identifies and prioritizes threats at the broad-scale. This Plan also provides a toolbox of fine-scale conservation measures for use and/or adaptation by LWGs (as appropriate to local population and habitat conditions), and for use in cases where a LWG plan has not been completed, or where no LWG currently exists.

Long-term monitoring of sage-grouse populations and habitats is crucial. This Plan outlines ways to accomplish this efficiently and effectively. Local working groups and others can then use these data to make good management decisions to conserve Idaho sage-grouse.

Goals

The primary goal of this Plan is to:

Maintain, improve, and where possible, increase sage-grouse populations and habitats in Idaho, while considering the predictability and long-term sustainability of a variety of other land uses.

Secondary goals of this Plan include:

- 1) Establishing broadly representative Local Working Groups in all SGPAs that currently lack them;
- 2) Fostering and supporting effective LWGs and their activities, throughout the range of sage-grouse in Idaho;
- 3) Fostering and supporting completion of LWG plans for all of Idaho's SGPAs and;
- 4) Fostering and supporting effective coordination among state and federal agencies, Tribes, and non-governmental cooperators to achieve the primary goal of this Plan.

Population and habitat objectives

The population objectives identified in this Plan are:

- 1) Maintain, and increase where possible, the present distribution and abundance of sage-grouse in Idaho; and
- 2) Reduce, eliminate, or mitigate the adverse impacts of human-related or unnatural disturbance to sage-grouse within or near breeding and winter habitat throughout Idaho.

The habitat objectives identified in this Plan are:

- 1) Maintain, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat, and continuity of habitats, at multiple spatial scales; and

- 2) Manage Idaho's landscape to foster a dynamic sagebrush ecosystem that includes a diverse species composition of sagebrush, grasses, and forbs; and incorporates structural characteristics that promote rangeland health in general, and sage-grouse habitat requirements in particular.

Specific numeric population and habitat objectives will be refined and developed through the LWG planning processes, consistent with data developed through broad- mid- and fine-scale monitoring and evaluation activities, and then incorporated into future revisions of this Plan.

Threats and conservation measures

This Plan presents a discussion of 19 threats to sage-grouse and their habitats, together with a toolbox of conservation measures designed to address each individual threat. Priorities will differ by SGPA depending on local conditions. LWGs are expected to develop a list of local threats specific to their area. The recommended conservation measures associated with each threat are designed to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate threats to sage-grouse or to ensure the long-term sustainability of sage-grouse habitat in Idaho. Local Working Groups are encouraged to adopt these conservation measures or others that are more locally appropriate. The conservation measures identified in this Plan should be implemented where feasible unless documented to be inappropriate at the site or project scale. Examples of such documentation could include: description of alternative conservation measures arising from site-specific analysis, monitoring, research, or adaptive management.

Research, monitoring and evaluation

This Plan includes discussion of research, monitoring and evaluation needs, guidelines and protocols for sage-grouse population monitoring, guidelines and protocols for sage-grouse habitat evaluation and monitoring, and related adaptive management recommendations.

Although a great deal is known about sage-grouse ecology and habitat, additional research is needed in order to better understand the range of factors that affect sage-grouse populations, sage-grouse habitat, and the relationship between them. Research is also needed to identify better ways of addressing both population and habitat needs.

The evaluation and monitoring of sage-grouse habitats and selected threats are crucial components in the implementation of this Plan. Standardized approaches for the collection and aggregation of spatial and tabular data across multiple scales are

presented along with specific tasks, timelines, and responsible parties. In some cases processes or protocols still need to be developed; in these cases suggested tasks and timelines are identified in the Plan to facilitate further action.

Implementation

In implementing this Plan and the LWG plans, a variety of multi-disciplinary expertise will be required. The commitment of landowners, resource users, and agency personnel to implementing the conservation measures, and monitoring and evaluation actions identified in this Plan, and in the LWG plans, is essential to successful conservation of sage-grouse and their habitat in Idaho.

When sage-grouse concerns arise at the local level, LWGs, agency representatives, landowners, and others will look first to the appropriate LWG plan for specific guidance. If a LWG plan is silent on the issue of concern, parties would look next to the state Plan for guidance. The LWGs are expected to work with, and through, the appropriate federal and state agencies, landowners, and regulatory processes to implement the conservation measures/actions identified in their LWG plans to reduce, eliminate, or mitigate identified threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat.

This Plan is intended to be a “living document” that will be periodically updated and/or amended as appropriate.

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v Acronyms

APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
ATV	All Terrain Vehicle.
BAER	Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CSP	Conservation Security Program
DOD	Department of Defense
DOE	Department of Energy
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentive Program
ERUs	Ecosystem Reporting Units
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ESR	Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation
FMP	Fire Management Plan
FMU	Fire Management Unit
GBRI	Great Basin Restoration Initiative
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICBEMP	Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project
IDFG	Idaho Department of Fish and Game
IDL	Idaho Department of Lands
IDPR	Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
IDWR	Idaho Department of Water Resources
INL	Idaho National Laboratory
IRMP	Integrated Resources Management Plan
ISDA	Idaho State Department of Agriculture
LWG	Local Working Group
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NF	National Forest
NFOP	Normal Fire Operations Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
OHV	Off-highway Vehicle
OSC	Office of Species Conservation
PECE	Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Effort s (USFWS)

PFC	Proper Functioning Condition
PPQ	Plant Protection and Quarantine (USDA APHIS)
RFD	Rural Fire Department
SAC	Idaho statewide Sage-grouse Advisory Committee
SAC TAT	Sage-grouse Advisory Committee Technical Assistance Team
SGHPM	Sage-grouse Habitat Planning Map
SGPA	Sage-grouse Planning Area
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USDI	U.S. Department of Interior
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
UV	Ultraviolet
WAFWA	Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (NRCS)
Wildlife Services	USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
WNV	West Nile Virus

vi Endorsements of Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho

This Conservation Plan for Sage-grouse in Idaho (Plan) summarizes the status of sage-grouse habitats and populations in Idaho, identifies statewide threats, and is intended to facilitate the implementation of conservation measures by state and federal agencies, Tribes, and willing non-governmental cooperators; and to complement and enhance the efforts of Local Working Groups. This Plan is the product of a collaborative effort that included state and federal resource agencies, Tribes, and non-governmental cooperators. Consultation and coordination with the Tribes will also occur through appropriate federal agency protocols.

This Plan will be implemented through the collaborative efforts of state and federal agencies, Tribes, Local Working Groups, and other willing non-governmental cooperators.

The following Sage-grouse Advisory Committee signature page and Memorandum of Understanding are intended to signal the commitment of various entities to collaboratively implement this Plan, while also acknowledging the different authorities, missions, and interests of the various parties to this Plan.

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Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee Signature Page

Recognizing that this signature page has no legal authority to bind any individual, agency, or non-governmental organization to any specific action, the following members of the Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC) agree, in their capacity as members of the SAC, to their endorsement of this Conservation Plan for Sage-grouse in Idaho (Plan); and agree to work collaboratively through the Idaho Local Working Groups, and other appropriate mechanisms, to support the intent and actions identified in this Plan.

This signature page applies only to the state Plan and does not imply individual endorsement of the LWG plans attached in Appendix J.

John Augsburg
Bureau of Land Management

Date

Tracy Behrens
Idaho Department of Lands

Date

Donna Bennett
Chair, Owyhee Local Working Group

Date

Russ Boyer
Member, Curlew Local Working Group

Date

Gene Gray
Member, West Central Local Working Group

Date

Ted Chu
Idaho Conservation League

Date

Ken Crane
Bureau of Land Management

Date

Dr. Stephen Goddard Idaho Birdhunters, Ada County Fish and Game League, Idaho Wildlife Federation	Date
Dan Gossett Sage-grouse Project Coordinator, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes	Date
Jim Hagenbarth Member, Upper Snake Local Working Group	Date
Robbert Mickelsen U.S. Forest Service	Date
Dr. William Platts Citizen Participant	Date
Peggy Redick Member, Challis Local Working Group	Date
Mike Remming Member, Jarbidge Local Working Group	Date
Rob Rogerson Member, Shoshone Local Working Group	Date
John Romero Idaho Cattle Association	Date

Memorandum of Understanding

BETWEEN THE STATE OF IDAHO
BY AND THROUGH THE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME,
DEPARTMENT OF LANDS,
OFFICE OF SPECIES CONSERVATION

AND

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT,
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE-INTERMOUNTAIN REGION,
ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE-WILDLIFE SERVICES,
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into by the STATE OF IDAHO, IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (ISDA), IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME (IDFG), IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF LANDS (IDL), OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR, OFFICE OF SPECIES CONSERVATION (OSC) AND the USDI BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM), USDA FOREST SERVICE (FS), USDA APHIS-WILDLIFE SERVICES and USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) (collectively referred to as the Parties).

INTRODUCTION

WHEREAS, the parties agree that sage-grouse are an important natural component of the sagebrush ecosystem. To this end, the parties hereby enter into this MOU for the purpose of supporting and implementing, to the extent practicable and where appropriate, the intent and actions contained in the **2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho**.

WHEREAS, the parties herein agree that increased cooperative efforts, consistent with applicable statutory requirements, Local Working Groups (LWGs) and their respective Plans, and the State-wide Plan, are necessary to conserve sagebrush ecosystems for the benefit of sage-grouse, other sagebrush dependent species, and people.

WHEREAS, the aforementioned government agencies continue to recognize and applaud the efforts of LWGs in conserving sage-grouse. Said agencies will continue to support these LWGs and their respective Plans, as they represent the heart of Idaho's sage-grouse conservation strategy.

I. AUTHORITIES

a. STATE AGENCIES:

Idaho State Department of Agriculture: Title 22, section 103 of the Idaho Code allows the ISDA to contract with any state agency, federal agency or agency of another state concerning any matter, program or cooperative effort within the scope and jurisdiction of the authority pursuant to law.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game: Title 36, section 1102 of the Idaho Code grants authority to IDFG to protect birds, including game birds like sage-grouse, in Idaho.

Idaho Department of Lands: IDL is directed by Article IX-Section 8 of the Idaho Constitution to manage the approximately 2.4 million acres of state endowment lands in such a manner as to secure the maximum long-term financial return to the institution to which granted. To the extent that it is consistent with this mandate, IDL has adopted a management policy that recognizes the value of wildlife and their habitats, and considers the impacts to wildlife habitat in management plans or projects. Where appropriate, IDL takes measures that protect or improve important and critical wildlife habitat, subject to the fundamental mission of IDL to support the endowments.

Office of Species Conservation: Title 67, section 818 of the Idaho Code allows the Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC) to negotiate agreements with federal agencies concerning endangered species, threatened species and candidate species. OSC is also responsible for coordinating the efforts of all state departments and divisions with duties and responsibilities affecting endangered species, threatened species and species to be listed.

b. FEDERAL AGENCIES:

Bureau of Land Management: The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA, Sec. 307, 43 USC 1737) which provides overall direction to the BLM for conservation and management of the public lands, also allows the agency to participate in conservation agreements. BLM Manual, Section 6840 (Special Status Species Management) provides overall policy direction to BLM managers to conserve listed threatened or endangered species on BLM administered lands, and to ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out on BLM administered lands do not contribute to the need for federal candidate or BLM Sensitive species to become listed.

Forest Service: The 2005 planning rule, in part, establishes requirements for the sustainability of ecological systems, the goal of which is “*to provide a framework to contribute to sustaining native ecological systems by providing ecological conditions to support diversity of native plant and animal species in the area*” (36 CFR 219.10). Agriculture Department Regulation 9500-4 directs the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to manage “*habitats for all existing native and desired non-native plants, fish, and wildlife species in order to maintain at least viable populations of such species,*” and to “*avoid actions which may cause a species to become threatened or endangered.*” USFS Manual section 2672.1 (Sensitive Species Management), directs national forests to provide special management emphasis for sensitive species of plants and animals to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for federal listing. Manual section 2672.12 allows regional foresters to enter into conservation agreements with the USFWS to remove threats to candidate species.

Natural Resources Conservation Service: The mission of the NRCS is to provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. Toward this end, NRCS is committed to improving biological resources by maintaining a high level of expertise in planning, using, and conserving soil, water, animals, plants, air, and related human resources. NRCS provides ecosystem-based assistance for the integrated management needed to sustain natural resources. Ecosystem-based assistance requires NRCS to use biological sciences to: 1) Develop and improve soil, water, animals, plants, air, and related human resources as integral components of all ecosystems, such as forest, range, cropland, and aquatic ecosystems, 2) Protect the habitat of threatened and endangered species of plants and animals and 3) Restore and safeguard unique ecosystems.

APHIS-Wildlife Services: Authority exists under the Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1469; 7 U.S.C. 426-426b) as amended, and under the Rural Development, Agriculture, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1988, (Public Law 100-202, 7 USC 426c) for APHIS-WS, acting under the Secretary of Agriculture, to conduct a program of wildlife services with respect to injurious animal species and to cooperate and enter into agreements with States, local jurisdictions, individuals, public and private agencies, organizations, and institutions in the control of nuisance mammals and birds and those mammal and bird species that are reservoirs for zoonosis diseases.

II. PURPOSE

The **purpose** of this MOU is to recognize the importance of the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho, as a backdrop for conserving sage-grouse in Idaho. In order to fully capture the value of said Plan, this MOU aims to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of the parties. Additionally, said MOU is intended to both emphasize the benefit contributed by the LWGs and encourage the efforts of the government agencies in supporting these vital groups.

The Parties herein also agree that increased cooperative efforts, consistent with applicable statutory requirements, LWGs and their respective Plans, and the State-wide Plan, are necessary to conserve sustainable healthy rangeland ecosystems to benefit sagebrush dependent species and the local economies that rely on them.

III. AGREEMENT PERIOD

This MOU shall be in effect when signed by all of the parties and remain in effect for five years. The MOU, however, may be extended or amended upon written request of any of the parties and the subsequent written concurrence of the others.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTIES

The Parties will coordinate activities and resources, when appropriate; however, the parties will control the expenditure of their own funds, in pursuing coordinated objectives.

Any costs borne by the parties under this MOU and any continuation thereof shall be contingent upon the availability of funds appropriated by the Congress of the United States or the Idaho Legislature.

V. OBLIGATIONS

a. STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SHALL:

- i. Continue to support and recognize the important role of the LWGs and their respective plans in conserving sage-grouse;
 1. Consider and implement, to the extent possible, completed LWG plans as appropriate under agency regulations, policies and the law.

2. Actively participate, to the extent possible, in the planning and implementation of LWG goals and objectives outlined in their respective plans;
 - a. Attend scheduled meetings and provide information to the LWG upon request;
 - b. Make available to the LWG all relevant information regarding the management of sagebrush and sage-grouse habitats; and
 - c. Cooperate with and provide advice to the LWG to the extent possible and consistent with the law, agency policy and regulations.
 3. Continue to assist in the development and completion of new LWG plans, for areas where none currently exist, by providing the aforementioned services. IDFG will assume the lead role in initiating, coordinating, and maintaining functional LWGs.
- ii. Implement, to the extent possible, the actions identified in the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho;
 1. Work collaboratively with the aforementioned federal government agencies, to the extent possible, in supporting the intent and actions identified in said Plan; and
 2. Work collaboratively through the Idaho LWGs, and other appropriate mechanisms, to support the intent and actions contained in said Plan.

b. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SHALL:

- i. Continue to support and recognize the important role of the LWGs and their respective plans in conserving sage-grouse;
 1. Consider and implement, to the extent possible, completed LWG plans as appropriate under agency regulations, policies and the law.
 2. Actively participate, to the extent possible, in the planning and implementation of LWG goals and objectives outlined in their respective plans;
 - a. Attend scheduled meetings and provide information to the LWG upon request;
 - b. Make available to the LWG all relevant information regarding the management of sagebrush and sage-grouse habitats; and
 - c. Cooperate with and provide advice to LWG to the extent possible and consistent with the law, agency policy and regulations.

3. Continue to assist in the development and completion of new LWG plans, for areas where none currently exist, by providing the aforementioned services.
- ii. Implement, to the extent possible, the actions identified in the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho;
 1. Work collaboratively with the aforementioned state government agencies, to the extent possible, in supporting the intent and actions identified in said Plan; and
 2. Work collaboratively through the Idaho LWGs, and other appropriate mechanisms, to support the intent and actions contained in said Plan.

VI. MODIFICATIONS

This agreement can be modified by the mutual, written consent of the parties at any time.

VII. CONGRESSIONAL RESTRICTIONS

Pursuant to Section 22, Title 41, United States Code, no member of or delegate to Congress shall be admitted to any share or part of this MOU or to any benefit to arise therefrom.

VIII. TERMINATION

This MOU may be terminated by any party upon sixty (60) days written notice to the other parties. The remaining parties can continue operating in accordance with the provisions of the MOU.

IX. ESTABLISHMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

This MOU is not intended to, and does not create, any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity, by a party against the United States or the State of Idaho its agencies, officers, or employees.

Furthermore, this MOU does not necessarily validate or approve any specific LWG plan or recommendation. This MOU establishes the aforementioned agencies' commitment to continue to actively participate and cooperate with the LWGs, and consider LWG plans, as appropriate under the law and agency regulation.

X. NON-FUND OBLIGATING DOCUMENT

Nothing in this MOU shall obligate any of the parties to obligate or transfer any funds. Specific work projects or activities that involve the transfer of funds, services, or property among the various agencies and offices of the parties will require execution of separate agreements and be contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds. Such activities must be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority. This MOU does not provide such authority. Negotiation, execution, and administration of each such agreement must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this MOU as of the last date written below:

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

By: _____
Bud Cribley, Acting State Director, Idaho BLM

Date: _____

FOREST SERVICE – INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

By: _____
Jack G. Troyer, Regional Forester,
Intermountain Region

Date: _____

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

By: _____
Steven M. Huffaker, Director

Date: _____

IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

By: _____
Patrick A. Takasugi, Director

Date: _____

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF LANDS

By: _____
Winston A. Wiggins, Director

Date: _____

OFFICE OF SPECIES CONSERVATION

By: _____
James L. Caswell, Administrator

Date: _____

USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

By: _____
Richard W. Sims, Idaho State Conservationist

Date: _____

USDA-APHIS, WILDLIFE SERVICES

By: _____
Jeffrey S. Green, Western Regional Director

Date: _____